

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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Take Precautions to Avoid Influenza As Cases Pick Up

With reports of flu cases around the state increasing, Wyoming's Department of Health director and state health officer is encouraging Wyoming residents to take common-sense precautions to avoid becoming ill with influenza.

Influenza (flu) is a contagious respiratory illness caused by a virus. Symptoms include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose and muscle aches. Influenza can cause severe illness and complications, particularly among older people.

Dr. Brent Sherard, Wyoming Department of Health director and state health officer said basic measures can help people prevent spreading influenza. "It's as simple as covering your mouth and nose with your sleeve or a tissue when you sneeze and cough; frequently washing your hands; and staying home from work, school, day care and errands when you are ill," he said. Flu shots are also still available in many locations.

According to Reginald McClinton, Wyoming Department of Health surveillance epidemiologist, about 100 cases have been reported statewide so far this season "Some people may be expecting that it's time for flu season to be winding down, but that's not the situation. We've seen a significant increase in influenza reports over the last couple of weeks," he said.

According to McClinton, influenza seasons are unpredictable in a number of ways. "Although epidemics of influenza occur annually, multiple factors may influence the timing and severity of the season," he continued. "At this point last year we had more than 300 reported cases." McClinton said the actual number of Wyoming influenza cases is likely to be much higher because most people who are ill do not seek medical care or are not tested for the disease, and not all providers report their results.

Sherard said, "If you do become ill, be sure to get lots of rest, drink plenty of liquids and avoid using alcohol or tobacco. You can also take medications to relieve your symptoms, but avoid giving aspirin to children or teens with flu-like symptoms."

In some cases, a doctor may recommend prescription antiviral medication to help treat influenza. Antiviral treatment must be started within two days of illness. "For antiviral medications to be an option, it is important to seek medical care quickly if you get flu-like symptoms," Sherard advised.

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